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ABSTRACT

Steps in the development of a Nucleus Testing Committee to assist in the development of a system-wide testing program in the Madison, Wisconsin, school system are described. Over 60 participants were selected for the committee, using the following selection guidelines: interest in the project and the role to be assumed, commitment to the school system, participant should be a respected member of the faculty, a background in testing or statistics was not necessary, voluntary participation, and availability for attendance at all meetings. Three sets of data needs emerged from the committee study: affective, curriculum-related, and standardized norm-referenced. (DB)

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THE MADISON PLAN:
A NEW APPROACH TO SYSTEM-WIDE TESTING

A SYMPOSIUM PRESENTED AT
THE WISCONSIN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING

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December 3-4, 1971
Cardinal Stritch College
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

THE PROGRAM

Chairman:
Walter M. Mathews, University of Mississippi

Participants:	Titles of Presentations:
T. Anne Cleary College Entrance Examination Board Walter M. Mathews University of Mississippi	The Nucleus Committee
Myron Seeman Madison Public Schools Coordinator of Health, Psychological and Social Services	The Testing Needs-Assessment
Aileen Nettleton Madison Public Schools Reading Consultant	Standardized Testing
Peter Christiansen Madison Public Schools Coordinator of Mathematics	Curriculum-Related Testing
Lee Hansen Madison Public Schools Coordinator of Research and Testing	The Affective Domain
Carmelo V. Sapone Madison Public Schools Director of Curriculum Development	The Administrative View

THE NUCLEUS TESTING COMMITTEE

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COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD

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In the Fall of 1971, the public school system of Madison, Wisconsin implemented a totally new testing program. Unlike most school testing programs, the Madison testing program was developed by the test consumers, people who use the tests such as the personnel in the schools -- teachers, counselors, principals -- and the major principle underlying its development was that no test, or any other evaluation instrument -- would be used unless it provided an amount of information that justified the costs in both time and money.

The standardized testing program of the previous year in the Madison schools was probably typical of school testing programs throughout the country -- massive testing with minimum use of the results.

Madison was not alone in its program of massive testing. Goslin (1963, pp. 53-4) estimated that each of the more than fifty million school children in the United States takes, on the average, three standardized tests per year. After studying data from several sources he concluded (1967, p. 18) that "the extent of testing in elementary schools is positively related to the average income level of families of children in the school and to the number of full- or part-time counselors in the school." Project Talent (Flanagan, 1962, Chapter 8) found that the dominant testing pattern

throughout the United States in grades one to eight contained the following: (1) reading achievement tests given five times from grades three through eight, (2) measures of mathematics achievement in four of the five years represented by grades four through eight, and (3) tests of English achievement in four of the five years represented by grades four through eight. Scholastic aptitude, vocational interest, and additional achievement tests in other areas were typically given during grades nine through twelve.

Madison, a high income community, had an extensive testing program. City-wide standardized achievement testing was administered in the Madison Public Schools at every grade save seven, eleven, and twelve, with intelligence testing added at grades two, four, six, and ten. Every student at grades four and six spent over six hours of actual working time taking standardized tests. In addition to the six hours of working time, several hours were required for instructions, collecting test booklets and other administrative tasks.

In his study of secondary schools, Goslin (1967, p. 25) noted that although the extent of test-giving was positively related to per pupil expenditures, extent of test <u>use</u> (as measured by an Index Of Test Use that he developed) appeared to be negatively related to per pupil expenditures. Thus, while schools which spent more money per pupil gave more tests, they made less frequent use of them according to the data. Last year, the Madison Public Schools had a per pupil expenditure of just under one

thousand dollars, and spent about 55 cents per pupil for testing materials and scoring services. Aside from the alphabetic class list which contained pupils' names and their scores, which was returned to the classroom teacher, and the individual gummed-labels, each of which contained a pupil's score and was routinely affixed to the pupil's permanent record, one other document was prepared in the Madison school system. This was a volume of over 200 pages that was a compendium of the results of testing throughout the system. It was filled with meaningful charts and tables and supplemented by descriptive text, but by the Superintendent's own evaluation, it was not utilized.

It is not surprising that the tests are not used: Many school personnel are not adequately trained in the use of test results. Goslin's study (1967, p. 34) showed that a fourth of the public elementary school teachers that he surveyed had never taken a graduate or under graduate course in tests and measurement, and slightly more than a fifth of the public secondary school teachers surveyed had never taken such a course. He (1967, p. 46) also found that elementary school teachers had less preparation in the area of tests and measurement than did either secondary teachers or guidance counselors, but the elementary school teachers had the greatest responsibility for administering standardized tests. The problem is particularly critical since improper administration procedures may contribute to the anxiety of those taking the test and Sarason (1960) has indicated that the long-range

effect of high test anxiety on the performance of elementary school children is cumulative and negative.

Few teachers in Madison were secretive about their feelings for city-wide testing: Many felt that it interrupted their primary function, teaching, and that it helped them little in comparison to the time it consumed. In looking through some of the machine-scored answer sheets that were returned from teachers, the feeling that some teachers had for testing was clearly transmitted: Sheets that were not to be "bent, folded, or mutilated" were found to be connected with a fold and a tear at the corner, stapled, glued, and even sewn.

Douglas Ritchie, the Superintendent of Schools, had been aware of the ineffectiveness of the testing program and charged a committee to correct the problem. He mobilized his Director of Curriculum, his Assistant Director of Pupil Services, and his Coordinator of Research and Testing and asked them to construct a design for change. Recognizing that basic change was needed, the psychometrician of the University of Wisconsin was invited to participate as a consultant.

Although decisions regarding the testing program had always been made by professional staff in the central administration, it was clear that the problems could not be solved unless those who were expected to use the test results were involved. While the information provided by a particular test might be useful in theory, there would be no purpose in administering it if the user either did not understand the information, or understanding it,

did not want it. In order to develop a testing program with justifiable costs, it was necessary to answer the basis question: "What information is needed about the child?" The respondents to this question should certainly be the consumers of testing information.

In order to involve the consumers of testing information in the decision process, it was decided to set up a workshop program. School personnel would be invited to participate and they would be used to gather information from other relevant groups -- students, parents, and other professional staff.

A workshop course was designed that had the following objectives:

1. To have participants learn the basic principles of testing.
2. To assess the testing needs of the Madison Public Schools.
3. To design the testing program for the Madison Public Schools.
4. To have the participants form a nucleus of trained personnel who would serve their schools in a resource capacity in testing.

Participation was invited from the central administration and actively recruited from the staff of each of the 35 schools in the system. One person from each elementary, middle, and junior high school, and two people from each high school were selected by the building principal. (The

principal was permitted to be a designated participant.) The following guidelines were used in selecting personnel:

1. Interest in the project and in the role to be assumed.
2. Commitment to the school system.
3. Participant should be a respected member of the faculty.
4. A background in testing or statistics was not necessary.
5. Voluntary participation.
6. Availability for attendance at all the meetings.

Response from the schools was slow in coming. Teachers and principals thought it was "another testing committee" whose recommendations would be "filed" by the central administration. Every effort was made to make it clear to the people in the schools that this new committee would have complete support from the Superintendent of Schools and that he and his administrative cabinet would carefully consider the output from the committee.

The beginning plans for the committee were developed in October and the first meeting was set for the beginning of December. The committee was called The Nucleus Committee for School Testing Specialists and participation came from all but two of the schools, with some schools requesting permission to send several participants. Over 60 participants were accepted into the program, including teachers from every grade level, psychologists, social workers, guidance counselors, elementary school principals, high school

assistant principals, curriculum specialists, and other central office personnel. A total of thirty hours of meetings were planned. The program began with an all-day Saturday workshop and met bi-weekly thereafter.

The Program

Since the initial charge to the group was simply to improve the city-wide testing program, and the changes were to be dictated by the participants in the Nucleus Testing Committee, the agenda for the meetings was not scheduled in advance but rather developed as the program developed. Indeed the morning of the first session was devoted to an exploration of what the participants wanted for the program, and the afternoon session concentrated on the issue of greatest concern to the participants. Initially this time was used to train the participants in the basic skills in measurement that they needed in order to critically analyze the technical manuals of standardized tests. While this was continuing, instrumentation was developed to determine the kind of data about children that was needed at various levels within the system, from the classroom teacher to the superintendent. The final instrument did not ask for the kind of information the respondent needed about children that could be gotten from standardized tests, but the kind of information that he needed to be properly prepared to do his job. An analysis of the results of this survey will be presented by the next speaker. In general, three sets of data-needs emerged from the study that fell under the domain of the Nucleus Testing Committee: Affective, curriculum-related, and standardized norm-referenced. Sub-committees were formed to design recommendations in these areas, and their recommendations will be presented by the chairmen of the committees.